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ABSTRACT

The document describes the In-School Suspension Project (ISSP), a program of the Northeast High School Complex in Macon, Georgia, which assigns students to in-school or in-house suspension rooms as an alternative to suspending juvenile delinquents/offenders out of school. The remedial strategy is reported to call for the cooperation of the county juvenile court and the department of human resources-youth services authorities in using ISSP as a referral device. It is stated that once a determination of suspension is made, a contact person for each school insures that all classroom assignments for the student are assembled and forwarded to ISSP along with a copy of the suspension notice. Another aspect of the remedial strategy is reported to include individualized instruction for each student. Three main advantages which have resulted from the use of the ISSP are listed: (1) students are counted as present in school while assigned to ISSP and thus the schools benefit from an increased ADA; (2) as students are required to complete all assignments before release, they keep current on their regular class work and are often able to move ahead of their classmates in work completed; and (3) students in ISSP are not "on the streets" associating with other youth and thus the likelihood of their contact with juvenile offenders is decreased. (SBH)

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DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION OF STATUS OFFENDERS:

AN IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROJECT

BY

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IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROJECT

1210 SHURLING DRIVE

BIBB COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MACON, GEORGIA

31211

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In 1975, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) began to fund projects for the diversion of juveniles away from the juvenile justice system. Traditional and historic approaches called for the secure detention or incarceration of alleged juvenile and status offenders as a group with segregation based only on sex. This form of juvenile justice reflects the adult model on which it is based. Recent distinctions in definitions of juvenile offenders have resulted in the recognition of the status offender as a separate sub-group of delinquent youth. A status offender is a juvenile who commits an offence which would not be considered as such were he an adult. Status offences are incorrigibility, unruly behavior, running away from home and truancy.

At approximately the same time that LEAA began to recognize the undesirable aspects of confining status offenders with adjudicated juvenile offenders, educators began seeking for alternatives to discipline problems in the schools. This was influenced, in part, by the fact that the juvenile and status offenders were often "in trouble" at school. In schools the traditional response of suspending a student out-of-school only served to reinforce the Briar Patch Effect of putting a student out "on the streets" where he wanted to be in the first place. This increased the liklihood that the student would come into contact with the juvenile justice system. A cyclic pattern was developing in which everyone lost.

One response by educators was the In-School Suspension concept. Instead of suspending students out of school, students were assigned to in-school or in-house suspension rooms. This removed the student from the regular academic setting but not from school. In-School Suspension provided a disciplinary response for school officials which had both punishment and remedial aspects.

In 1977, guidelines from LEAA under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) addressed the importance of deinstitutionalizing the status offender. It called for alternatives to the secure detention or incarceration of status offenders with adjudicated or alleged juvenile delinquents/offenders.

A combination of these approaches resulted in the establishment of an In-School Suspension Project (ISSP) at the Northeast High School Complex in Macon, Georgia, in September, 1977. The Northeast High School Complex is one of three administrative school districts in the Bibb County School System. The Northeast Complex is comprised of two junior high schools serving grades 8 and 9 (approximately 900 students) and two senior high schools (approximately 1250 students). A federal grant from the State Crime Commission of Georgia was awarded in the summer of 1977 for a two year period. Funding was allocated from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of LEAA. The Grant award of $26,750 for each of three eight month blocks, on a 90% federal and 10% local match basis, covered project expenditures in the areas of personnel salaries, equipment, travel and supplies, and operating expenses. The Bibb County Board of Education assumed the cost of two modular double-wide units and additional expenses of utility connections and landscaping. One of the units is divided into two classrooms for students assigned to the Project. The other unit is divided into counseling, conference, and testing rooms, and administrative areas.

The Project operates through preventive and remedial strategies. The preventive strategy involves the use of the program by school officials of the Northeast Complex as a disciplinary alternative to out-of-school suspensions. Assignment to ISSP is made by the principal or assistant principal of the school which the student regularly attends. The number of days which a student may be assigned to ISSP is necessarily dependent on the student involved and the nature of the offence and/or school rule violation. An average assignment to ISSP is three days, though this is left to the discretion of the principal. Some students become eligible for "early release" based upon good behavior, completed work, and the permission of their regular school principal. If they come back to ISSP for any reason they must make up the days they were released.

It was anticipated that some students may ask to be placed in ISSP or deliberately act out for placement. As that type of incident is viewed as symptomatic of a problem rather than the problem itself, this type referral is also left to the discretion of the school principal.

Offences as recognized by the Bibb County Board of Education for which assignment to ISSP may be deemed appropriate may include, but are not limited to, the following: smoking (jr. high only), fighting, cutting class, cutting school, excessive tardiness, possession and/or use of drugs or alcohol, profanity or obscene gesture, cheating, theft, misconduct, willful disobedience, failure to serve assigned detention, public display of affection, and possession of illegal objects.

Once a determination of suspension is made, a contact person for each school insures that all classroom assignments for the student are assembled and forwarded to ISSP along with a copy of the suspension notice. Students normally report the day following suspension.

The remedial strategy calls for the cooperation of Bibb County Juvenile Court and the Department of Human Resources-Youth Services authorities in using ISSP as a referral device. When it is obvious to the court that the juvenile cannot handle his problems without outside intervention, it may, if appropriate, refer the juvenile to ISSP as a method of treatment (case work technique) which falls short of secure detention or incarceration, but extends beyond simple probation or dismissal. The program can be used at the intake and probation stages of the Juvenile Court process.

It was seen that the circumstances surrounding the contact which status and juvenile offenders have with the Juvenile Justice System transcend the treatment which the court and its support services can provide. No one agency is competent to provide for the multifarious problems which may lead to a child's contact with the Juvenile Justice System. This has been recognized in the state laws through extension of referral functions to other agencies by the Juvenile Court and its intake and probation officers.

Referral support for the program reflects the acknowledgement that the problems of juveniles are complex and deserve a broad-based, flexible treatment strategy. State and local agencies which work with the Project include:

Bibb County Board of Education

Bibb County Juvenile Court

Bibb County Sheriff's Department

Department of Family and Children's Services

Department of Human Resources - Court Services

Department of Human Resources - Mental Health

Family Counseling Center

Macon-Bibb County Public Health Department

Macon Police Department

Middle Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission

Middle Georgia Council on Drugs

United Way Agencies

Contact persons and agency representatives may use the office and counseling rooms available at the center to meet with students and/or their families as well as regular school personnel with whom the student may come into contact.

Another aspect of the remedial strategy is the individualized instruction each student receives. Students are required to finish all work assignments which are sent for him/her to the satisfaction of the ISSP instructors. Most students are able to complete their assigned classwork as well as additional work assigned by ISSP staff. All work is returned to the regular teacher who checks and grades the completed assignments. Because of the structured and quiet atmosphere maintained in the ISSP classrooms, students are able to receive more help with their assignments than their regular teacher might be able to provide.

Additionally, repeat clients to ISSP are given an educational or psychological evaluation. Parent permission is obtained and the confidential results are reported to the parents and appropriate school officials on a "need to know" basis. The results of such examinations are used to pinpoint academic strengths and weaknesses, suggest remediation, and to identify specific problems which may also require attention.

All students assigned to ISSP receive a parent contact and/or home visit. The parent contact is usually done by telephone for the student who is assigned to ISSP for the first time. Repeat clients and students whose family have no telephone or could not be contacted receive a home visit by ISSP staff. During the contact/visit the parents are informed of the nature of the child's disciplinary action, the resources of the center explained, and assistance is offered.

The ISSP is staffed by a Project Director, two Instructors (one certified in Language Arts/Social Science and the other in Math/Science) and an Aide/Typist.

Students report to ISSP at regular school reporting times. A morning attendance report is phoned to all schools which have students assigned.

Three main advantages have resulted from the use of the ISSP: 1) students are counted present in school while assigned to ISSP and thus the schools benefit from an increased ADA; 2) as students are required to complete all assignments before release, they keep current on their regular class work and are often able to move ahead of their classmates in work completed; and 3) students in ISSP are not "on the streets" associating with other youth and thus the liklihood of their contact with juvenile officials is decreased.

Corporal punishment is not a feature of ISSP in any way. Students, upon arrival, are informed of the rules and their signature acknowledges that they have read (or had read to them) the rules and conditions of ISSP. A violation of ISSP rules may result in extra days added to their original stay. Violent and disruptive behavior is isolated and restrained. Students are held responsible for their behavior and the consequences for inappropriate behavior consistently enforced.

The In-School Suspension Project is in its second year of federal funding. It is anticipated that one additional eight month funding period will be approved which will carry the project through April 30, 1980. Contingent upon local fund availability and continued project success, the Bibb County Board of Education plans to assume the cost of the project at that time. Eventually, all three secondary level complexes will have their own center.

The In-School Suspension Project has been selected for three convention level presentations this year and has received numerous visits and requests for information. This is a partial indicator of the success of the project and its ability to serve as a model for behavior alternatives in the school and community.